

EXTRACTS.

THE SULTAN'S WEIR.

The Sultan's Weir at Merv, which the Russians intend to restore, was destroyed rather more than a hundred years ago by a very remarkable man. Sir John Malcolm calls him one of the most extraordinary characters that any age or country has produced.

Beggi Jan, to give him the familiar appellation which his subjects preferred—his Excellency the Lord of Benevolence, as the latter title ran—was a strange mixture of ascetic, statesman, and soldier. He lived like a fakir, and ruled and fought like a king. His coat bore the inscription, "Power and dignity, when founded on justice, are from God; when not, from the devil." The Mayor of the Palace to a puppet Khan of Balkh, he went about dressed like a beggar. He appeared before the nobles one day with fewer rags than usual; he had cut off a part of his hair, he explained, to give to a poor man. When his father died he went round Balkh with a sword at his throat, offering his life to any one who would take it, as expiation for the sins which his parent, a dissolute and feeble old man, had committed. Absolute master of the State Treasury, he drew only such pay as would suffice to keep a poor student. "Learn, lady," he would say to his wife, "to be content with little, that thy God may be content with thee." His authority extended from the Oxus to the Jaxartes; and the Uzbegs of Balkh, usually a stiff-necked unruly generation, obeyed him with a respect bordering on worship. These Tatars, says Sir John Malcolm, "were easily persuaded that a leader who contended the worldly pleasures they prized, and who preferred the patched mantle and crooked staff of a mendicant priest to a royal robe and sceptre, must act under the immediate direction of the Divine Being. Riding in his beggar's dress at the head of his army, he made yearly incursions into Khorassan, subdued Merv, and waged war with the ruler of Cabul. A curious account of his camp is given by a Persian writer. Beggi Jan is described dining on a piece of stale barley-bread and a little meat, served up on a wooden platter. "God knows," says the fastidious Persian, "in what year of the Hegira the bread had been baked." Beggi Jan, with all his power, was content to hold only the title of Minister. His son assumed that of Sovereign, and was the great-grandfather of the present Amur of Balkh.

The story of the conquest of Merv by Beggi Jan is as follows. The Sultan's Weir at Merv was protected by a fort. The commandant of this fort was enamoured of a young lady of the place, whose charms, however, had also attracted the notice of the Governor of Merv. This led to much ill-feeding; and when the governor sent so far as to forcibly abduct the lady, the commandant, in disgust, surrendered his fort to Beggi Jan. Beggi Jan promptly cut the Sultan's Weir and the people of Merv, threatened with the horrors of famine, gave in. They were deported to Balkh, and Merv fell rapidly into decay. The Russians, according to the St. Petersburg *Novosti*, hope to restore the oasis to its former prosperity by repairing the Sultan's Weir. This engineering work is said to have been built of stone, faced with bitumen, and hydraulic cement. Some few years before the Russian occupation, the Tekke Turkomans made a similar dam, which, however, is always liable to be damaged by floods.

The Seljuk Sultan, Sandjar, from whom the Sultan's Weir (*Bund-e-Sultan*) takes its name, was a more powerful Tartar Beggi Jan. His empire stretched from Kashgar to Antioch, from the Caspian to the Euphrates. Alarv was his capital, and he was buried there. The Mongols destroyed his tomb; but the weir he built has commemorated his name for upwards of seven centuries.—*St. James's Gazette*.

A WONDERFUL NUT.

Planters in tropical climates are recommended to cultivate the kola-nut, the nut of which seems to possess some marvellous qualities. If the prophecies regarding the beneficial services of certain preparations of it are realized an unspeakable boon will be conferred on millions of the human race. For many years it has been extensively used as an excellent beverage and sacred symbol in the interior of Africa; but now its properties have every reason to be far more extensively utilized. There is no doubt (a writer in the *Seafarman* says) from what is already known, that it has an extraordinary property of counteracting the influence of alcohol, of pining, stimulant in wasting diseases, of acting as a powerful tonic in cases of deep-seated injuries of the digestive organs, of purifying foul water, of overcomimg the sense of fatigue, and of exciting to arduous work with the least injury to the frame.

It appears that kola-nuts were originally found in the western territories of Africa, and that soldiers stationed along the coast were the first white men who became aware of their peculiar property. They found, for instance, that the chewing of these nuts prevented a drunken headache. Not only so, but some who have used these as a "pick-me-up" assert that, while removing the "nerves," it gives them quite a "stunner" at the smell of whisky and removes the irritating desire for a "moaning" to keep the stomach healthy. "If the paste be mixed with cacao-paste, which it resembles closely, it produces a much finer and more nutritive chocolate. It has been shown by repeated experiments that the nerve energy produced by partaking of the chocolate made with kola-paste is ten times greater than that produced by an equal quantity of ordinary cocoa-chocolate. So nutritious is this kola, that with a single cup of it a labourer can undergo a day's work without any sense of weariness. Though it may not directly feed the muscular system, it has the property of preventing the rapid waste of the tissues. S. much have the manufacturers of chocolate, both in this country and abroad, been desirous to the excellent properties of the new paste, that they are making arrangements to procure it for mixing purposes, as soon as its price becomes reasonable. The British Government, too, have gone the length of making experiments upon the paste in a pure state, so as to ascertain the saving which would be made in the transit of provisions in time of war by giving this beverage to the army. It is of great service for purifying the foul water which is so prevalent in hot climates; this will be the preventive of many diseases, especially to Europeans. It has also been found very useful in clarifying beer and spirits, acting much like the white of an egg, or in glass. A comparison between the composition of kola, tea, coffee, and cocoa shows that the proportion of caffeine is higher in kola than in any of the others, and it exceeds cocoa in the obromine. Just as with tea among old ladies, the kola maintains the health and strength of the body in an equal degree upon a smaller supply of ordinary food, and arrests the waste, enabling the less energetic powers of digestion to supply as much as is needed to repair the wear and tear of the solid tissues. The obromine of cocoa resembles the tannin of tea and the caffeine of cacao, and contains even a larger quantity

of nitrogen. This element in the kola is also very active, exercising an exhilarating and soothing, hunger-stilling and waste-reducing effect upon the human system.

Dr. Nachigal gives some interesting information about the kola-nut from personal experience. He tried it for some time himself, and, in his book on the Soudan, bears testimony to the great power it has over the system. The craving for it becomes more intense than that for either tobacco or alcohol; and he had great difficulty in giving up its use. In some places it is so highly prized that for the dry powder of the nut an equal weight of gold is given in exchange. Kola, too, works a wonderful social charm among the Soudanese. An interchange of white kola between two chiefs is like the snuff-box between two Highlanders—the mark of friendship and peace; but a red kola soon is indicative of defiance. When a young chief has made up his mind that he would like to marry the princess of another tribe he sends to her mother a present of white kola; with which he awaits the return of the white kola, or symbol that his host had accepted, or the red kola as a hint that his application had been gracefully rejected. Marriages rejoicing would be postponed or stopped if it was seen that the white kola was wanting among the bride's presents. The negro of Western Africa takes the oath with intense solemnity if he stretches out his hand over kola-seeds.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND REMINISCENCES OF MR. FRITH.

Two volumes just published by Mr. Frith tell the story of the 50 years of his artistic life. His father, who was a thriving inn-keeper at Harrogate, had set his heart upon his son becoming a Royal Academician. "What impelled me to the dead which determined my future life I cannot tell." The momentous deed was the copying of a dog, which, according to the artist, was "a lamentable failure." But he received a reprieve for the first attempt. He was sent to a nursery school, where he learnt next to nothing. He declares emphatically that, except in most exceptional instances, judgment as to a boy's capabilities from early specimens of work is impossible. His own destiny was decided by a strange misconception, or by the carelessness of the Court of Appeal. The father had brought the boy from Harrogate to town on the understanding that they were to abide by the opinion of some Academician. If the Academician pronounced favourably on the specimens submitted to him, the boy was to resign himself to the study of art; on the contrary, if the efforts of E.A. acknowledged his crime, was reprieved, and a by-law was made, ordering that no Academician or other exhibitor should, under grievous penalties, dare to paint on anybody's picture but his own."

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